



dent in U.S. 1986: Congress passes law requiring chemical facilities to annually report toxic releases and inventories. Chernobyl production. Department of Energy picks Yucca Mountain, NV for permanent nuclear waste disposal site. 1988: Shell Oil refinery

HEALTHY COMMUNITIES

Building community capacity for the future

EPA is typically known as a government regulator: setting standards for environmental protection and then enforcing them. But in addition to this important role, EPA devotes a large share of our budget to enabling the environmental protection work of state, tribal and local agencies and thousands of individuals, businesses and community groups.

This cooperative approach strives to achieve real community-based environmental protection, with local people taking the lead. Here are a few examples:

Enabling Indian tribes to protect their environment

Since 1986, EPA has been authorized to delegate implementation of federal environmental laws to tribes as it has historically done with states. Federal government agencies also have a responsibility to assist tribes and build meaningful government-to-government relations. For the past seven years, EPA has made it a top priority in the Pacific Southwest to fulfill these responsibilities.

In the last five years, the number of tribes developing their own environ-

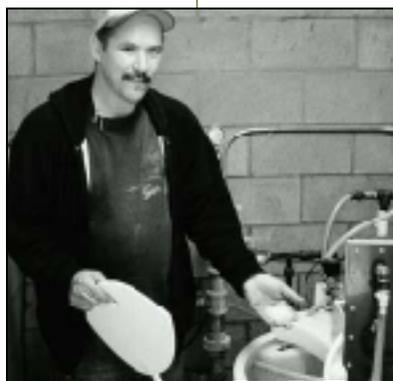
mental programs in the region has increased from 19 to 116, a 600 percent jump. With EPA technical and financial assistance, many tribes have completed surveys of reservation environments and are taking action to clean up pollution.

These activities have resulted in innovative projects such as: the **Pyramid Lake Paiute Tribe** working to save beautiful Pyramid Lake in Nevada; the **Navajo Nation** joining with Superfund to survey and begin cleanup of all the abandoned uranium sites across a territory the size of West Virginia; the **Hoopa Tribe** preparing water quality standards for the Trinity River; the **Washoe Tribe** working to list Leviathan

Mine – one of the largest (and most toxic) abandoned mines in the West – as a Superfund site; the **Yurok** and other tribes capping open garbage pits; and the **Gila River Indian Community** working with EPA's emergency response team to stop a massive tire fire on the Gila River Reservation.

Following through for communities in need

One fundamental of healthy communities is to address the needs of



An environmental specialist at Campo Indian Reservation



Through its environmental program, the Pyramid Lake Paiute Tribe has worked to save beautiful Pyramid Lake in Nevada.

our most vulnerable populations. At EPA, we pay special attention to children, people of color, and low income communities, who often bear the greatest burden of environmental pollution.

We have identified five risks that are critical for **children**: asthma, lead, cancer, pesticides, and air toxics. To address pesticide risk, for example, we targeted two unregistered products – an insecticidal chalk and moth repellents – which pose particular risks to children. We also support several projects on pesticide use and exposure among children at risk in farm communities and along the U.S.-Mexico border. EPA is taking a similarly aggressive approach to lead exposure, which can stunt children's intellectual development. We tested almost 40,000 kids in Tijuana and have extensive outreach and training for families there, in San Diego and West Oakland. We have ambitious programs to address indoor air quality, asbestos, and pesticides in schools, and helped

fund a Children's Health Network website (www.cehn.org). In Los Angeles and on the border in Nogales, AZ we support unique education campaigns for Latino children, their teachers and parents on asthma prevention.

Another priority area for EPA is our work on behalf of communities of color. The **environmental justice (EJ) movement** has challenged us to be fair in our decision making and to prioritize issues of concern in poor communities (e.g. lead poisoning, subsistence fishing and asthma) and to engage them respectfully in decisions concerning their neighborhoods. Beyond extensive efforts in each of EPA's programs to respond to EJ issues, our Pacific Southwest office has assembled an EJ action team (and hotline at 415/744-1565) to give communities of color direct access to agency leaders and resources.

Beyond boosting access, we've boosted **enforcement efforts** to crack down on polluters in com-

munities of color. In 1999, for the first time ever and in collaboration with local and state agencies, EPA began carrying out an ambitious pilot regional enforcement strategy for historically underserved parts of Los Angeles.

EPA is also building the capacity of communities of color to conduct **environmental monitoring and outreach**. Through our EJ program, we've dispensed nearly 70 grants and witnessed amazing results, including: used oil recycling programs for two Indian communities in Arizona; an assessment of fish consumption levels and potential health risks among Laotians in Richmond, CA; an air monitoring program near a geothermal plant in the rural community of Pahoia, HI; and a grassroots environmental coalition straddling the border at Nogales (in Arizona and Mexico).

A community right to know

One of the most powerful tools EPA has employed in the last few years is getting information into the hands of people. Our community right-to-know program, known as the **Toxics Release Inventory (TRI)**, helps people learn about toxic releases to air, water, and land from industrial facilities in their neighborhoods. Just publicizing the amount of toxins that industries release to the environment creates an incentive for industry, the public, and government to work together to reduce harmful pollution. Since TRI began in 1989, reported toxic releases have plummeted in Arizona (by 75%), California (75%) and Hawaii (82%).

Another way EPA helps people get information is through **EMPACT (Environmental Monitoring for Public Access and Community Tracking)**. This grants program enables communities to secure monitoring equipment to test their own air, water and soil. By the end of 1999, EMPACT enabled: people living near oil refineries in Richmond, CA to sample their air for toxins; people in Las Vegas to develop a blueprint for an air monitoring system; retirement community residents of Green Valley, AZ to monitor their air after they complained about being able to taste and smell it; children to monitor UV radiation levels and learn “sunwise” ways to handle exposure to the sun; and people throughout the Pacific Southwest to check a website with real-time maps of smog in their area (www.epa.gov/airnow).

Catalyzing better community development

The last few years have seen “smart growth” movement sweep across America, whereby towns

and cities are working to reduce their environmental impacts and increase their livability by planning better communities and protecting open space. While EPA plays no direct role in these efforts, we provide resources to facilitate locally driven projects.

Through our **Sustainable Development Challenge Grant** program, we funded a series of collaborative projects, including: a sustainability plan for the Ewa and North Shore regions of Honolulu; new planning options for neighborhoods in Phoenix and Scottsdale, AZ; community gardening and greening in San Francisco, Los Angeles, and Nogales, AZ; rainforest restoration on the Hamakua Coast of Hawaii; “urban village” development to preserve farmland in California’s Central Valley; sustainable development for rural communities on the island of Maui; and rejuvenation plans for suburban downtowns in Southern California.

EPA has also helped communities by cleaning up and reinvesting in



EPA is paying special attention to the effects of pesticides on children.

abandoned areas through our **Brownfields Initiative** – a program created by President Clinton in 1995 to work with cities, tribes, and states to clean up and transform contaminated properties into new homes and businesses. In the Pacific Southwest alone, EPA has seeded 30 brownfields pilot projects with \$200,000 each and six projects with revolving loan funds.

The results of these investments have been impressive. For example, the City of Las Vegas was the first in the nation to use an EPA revolving fund loan and turn a brownfield (a decommissioned National Guard armory) into a community asset (including a small business incubator, cultural center and retail stores). Further west, the cities of Los Angeles and East Palo Alto, CA have been designated as brownfield “**showcase communities**,” in which EPA is coordinating with other federal agencies and supporting ambitious local plans to rejuvenate sizable old industrial parks. This effort is expected to result in 2,300 new jobs in LA and more than \$1 million a year in new tax revenues for East Palo Alto.



Through our Brownfield Initiative, EPA has helped fund the transformation of a neglected site in West Hollywood into what will be a vibrant commercial center.